



Lee Harvey Oswald

OSWALD - as only a Marine Buddy Could Know Him

by Kerry Thornley

In the Marines they called Lee Oswald a Subversive

NO clear picture of the first time I saw Lee Harvey Oswald remains in my memory. He did not make a lasting first impression on me, for in appearance he was practically nondescript.

I had transferred into his outfit, Marine Air Control Squadron Nine, Santa Ana, California, in either the late winter or early spring of 1959. It was here that I got to know Oswald.

When I think of Oswald's name in connection with those days, I hear it being shouted by an officer in a voice that seems worn thin by irritation.

And in my mind's eye I see a jarhead private with a swab in hand, slopping soapy water over the wooden plank porch of the operations hut.

The private has the bill of his

cap pulled down over his eyes, apparently so he will have to see as little of the unpleasant military world around him as possible.

With this picture, there is a vague feeling of sympathy that might find expression in the question: Why are they picking on that poor guy?

As time went on I came to gather other, more vivid impressions of Private Oswald — but that image of him as a poor, persecuted soul never entirely vanished. Oswald kept it fresh.

When he was ordered to do something, he would answer: "Yes, sir," in a tone of voice that showed clearly that he had expected to be ordered to do the job, but that he sure didn't have to like doing it.

And if, by chance, you didn't

see that Oswald was obviously being picked on he would mention it to you.

But as his words and tone made clear, Oswald was willing to be grimly amused by the whole thing.

I don't want to give the impression that Oswald's persecution complex was a central aspect of his personality at that time. It was not.

It was instead observed out of the corner of an eye while considering the whole man. In my unprofessional opinion he was not paranoid.

But as I told the Warren Commission, I did think there was in him a tendency toward paranoia that, in certain circumstances, might become more pronounced.

I'm certain that in his own eyes Oswald was the most important

ABOUT the AUTHOR

Kerry Thornley is a young writer who was a Marine Corps buddy of Lee Harvey Oswald, President Kennedy's accused assassin.

This is the first of a series of four articles by Mr. Thornley based on his remembrances of one of the 20th Century's strangest characters. Thornley, who appeared before the Warren Commission as an expert witness, obviously knew Oswald better than anyone outside the slayer's family — and perhaps even better than they.

MEN'S DIGEST magazine is proud to present this important series of articles which throws light on the personality of Oswald and helps to explain why he killed President Kennedy.



John F. Kennedy

and a 'Born Loser'

man in our Marine unit. To him the mark of destiny was clearly visible on his forehead. The fact that some people were blind to it was to him an eternal source of aggravation.

It was far more comforting for him to know that there were those who would gladly kill him than it would have been for him to think he was just another faceless Marine in the ranks at morning muster.

For, deep within, he feared that he really was that faceless nobody — and the hostility of others, when directed at him alone, was his reassurance that he was, indeed a very unique somebody.

A somebody who could provoke anger, and perhaps a little fear, in those an unjust system had placed above him. This was the

image of himself he required and which he strove to maintain.

In contrast to Oswald's image of himself was his appearance. He was not much taller or much shorter than most other people. Nor was he much heavier or much leaner.

His hair was medium brown. His eyes were blue-grey. If anything he was a bit smaller than most men, a bit lighter in weight. That was all. But considering that he had such a poor foundation on which to build a striking appearance, Oswald did pretty well.

First, he set himself off by maintaining a tight and angry little smile at all times.

Then, he managed to look a little sloppier in his dress than any other Marine.

But beyond that there was nothing

striking about his appearance. For the most part he had to rely on his words to emphasize his individuality.

An observer who saw Oswald in the Marines might have concluded that he was a real object of persecution.

After all, he was most often involved in some menial job usually associated with disciplinary actions.

But Oswald brought this on himself. He went out of his way time after time to do whatever he could to displease those in authority.

There were other times, though, when Oswald had good reason to believe that "they" were after him and that he was being persecuted.

The most dramatic example

came before I arrived in MACS-9. A young lieutenant happened to notice in the mail room a newspaper, addressed to Oswald, which was in Russian and which had been mailed from the Soviet Union.

According to the story, the lieutenant grew very excited over his discovery and possibly made an open issue of Oswald's probable sympathy to the Communist cause, making him out to be some kind of "subversive."

Most of the troops, who by this time had learned to take Oswald with a grain of salt, were very much amused at the lieutenant's having pushed the panic button. Oswald, needless to say, wasn't so amused.

But apparently the lieutenant's warning of a "subversive" in the camp was ignored by his superiors — who perhaps had learned to take enthusiastic young lieutenants with a grain of salt.

So this was Marine Private Lee H. Oswald. The outfit's eightball. A born loser.

And what did Oswald — who was very bitter about his position — believe to be the reason for his eightball status?

Certainly not the real ones. Rather, Oswald chose the explanation which was most attractive to him.

He was "persecuted" because of his superior intelligence and because he was regarded as a "subversive."

It took a special kind of mind to evade the real facts for these fanciful ones.

As the Warren Report later said concerning this period in Oswald's life:

"He (Lee Harvey Oswald) used his Marxist and associated activities as excuses for his difficulties in getting along in the world, (difficulties) which were caused by different factors."

But Oswald at this time in his life, was far from despairing.

For one thing, his service in the Marine Corps was about to end.

And, beyond his coming day of discharge, a whole new world awaited him — a world that would somehow be different from what he'd known in the past.

Perhaps he would go to the Soviet Union and play an impor-



tant role in the building of a new humanity.

Perhaps he would go to Cuba and join Castro in the fight to free the rest of the Caribbean from the clutch of the imperialists.

A thousand opportunities awaited the man who bore the mark of destiny. He had only to choose among them.

While he marked time in the service, and dreamed of his future greatness, I had chances to observe him often.

My first really vivid memory of Oswald was a brief conversation we had one afternoon, when we were sitting around the base recreation area in the afternoon.

Lee was reading a note book, possibly studying Russian. Other troops were involved in a religious discussion.

Gradually, I lost interest in the book I was reading and joined the bull session on religion. When one

of the men asked my views, I said I was an atheist.

"So am I," said Oswald, glancing up from his note book. "I think the best religion is Communism."

"Yeah, Oswald's a Red," one of the other men said.

"No, I'm not a Communist. I just think they have the best system."

"Why?" I wanted to know.

"Because they have a purpose. And the Communist way of life is more scientific than ours. You don't have to believe in a bunch of fairy tales to accept it."

So much for our first conversation. As I think back, he made it even more clear in our next few talks that he was a Marxist.

— Next month —
in MEN'S DIGEST:
Part Two
Oswald and Communism

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